Rifle Marksmanship

CAPTAIN JOHN L. WOLF

The Army's standard service rifle has always been the primary tool of the infantry's trade, and it will continue to be so into the foreseeable future. It therefore stands to reason that marksmanship training should be of primary importance both in one station unit training (OSUT) and in TOE units.

The basic rifle marksmanship (BRM) program of instruction (POI) for Infantry OSUT soldiers consists of 14 periods and 62 hours of formal instruction as well as 30 to 40 additional hours of reinforcement training conducted by drill sergeants. This program is designed to develop qualified marksmen from soldiers who have had little or no previous shooting experience. The program uses a progressive, building block approach to marksmanship and the integrated act of shooting.

The POI is conducted in three distinct phases: Preliminary rifle instruction, down-range feedback, and field fire.

During Phase I the soldiers are introduced to the M16A1/A2 rifle, its care and maintenance, and the four fundamentals of marksmanship—steady position, aiming, breath control, and trigger squeeze. The extensive use of dry fire, dime-washer drills, target-box exercises, and the Weaponeer system prepares soldiers to fire their first live rounds.

Phase II is conducted on a 25-meter zero range and either known distance (KD) or modified field fire ranges. Soldiers learn to zero their weapons, to fire consistently accurate shot groups, and to receive shot-by-shot feedback at varying distances from 75 to 300 meters.

The final phase, field fire, consists of practice for and the conduct of record fire qualification, automatic fire, and night fire ranges. All soldiers leave the U.S. Army Infantry Training Center at Fort Benning and go to their initial assignments qualified as Marksmen, Sharpshooters, or Expert riflemen.

Once these soldiers reach their units, unfortunately, they find that marksmanship training seldom receives the same emphasis that it received in OSUT. Many commanders view weapon qualification as just something else to be completed before their units can "get on with more important things." The most common excuses for a weak marksmanship program are limited resources (time, ammunition, range facilities) and a lack of skilled trainers.

To remedy this situation, rifle marksmanship should be included in every unit's mission essential task list (METL), and every commander should be required to develop a marksmanship program that will ensure high-quality training.

To maintain their marksmanship skills, experienced soldiers do not need the extensive marksmanship instruction that initial entry soldiers receive. But good marksmanship is a perishable skill that requires continuous sustainment, and so an effective unit marksmanship program should include all three of the phases used in OSUT.

The following proposed unit training program incorporates all of these phases and can be implemented in any type of unit and at any level. The training described costs a little extra in terms of critical resources, but the cost is well justified, given that marksmanship is a mission essential task. The entire program can be executed in two days for a 150-man company. The total ammunition requirement is 128 rounds per man, or 98 rounds per man if KD firing is not included. The keys to success are planning

and emphasis by commanders and proper execution by small unit leaders.

Phase I. A weapons maintenance session and inspection is conducted before firing to identify weapon deficiencies that might cause problems on the range. Magazines are inspected because many malfunctions are caused by old, defective magazines.

Dry fire training is conducted and the four fundamentals of marksmanship are reinforced during the days prior to range firing. Squad leaders train their own squads. The commander allots time on the training schedule instead of relying upon hip-pocket training. A buddy team approach is used in which one man serves as a peer coach to observe his partner and make corrections. This develops individual proficiency, provides quality control on the skills being practiced, and helps develop marksmanship proficiency in the unit's subordinate leaders.

Phase II. Down-range feedback is conducted on a 25-meter zero range or, if resources are available, on a KD range. To establish a pattern of consistent individual firing techniques, soldiers fire three-round shot groups without making sight adjustments. This should take no more than 9 to 18 rounds per man. Still using buddy teams, the coach concentrates on the shooter, not on the target down range.

Weapons are zeroed using the current M16 zero target, NSN 6920-01-167-1396. (The Canadian Bull is no longer used, and younger soldiers have never seen it.)

KD firing confirms battlesight zero at various ranges and builds the soldiers' confidence. Thirty rounds fired at 100, 200, and 300 meters (10 rounds at each range) is sufficient.

Phase III. A 40-round practice record fire is conducted. Again, a coach is used with each firer to watch him and help him correct any problems. The qualification table is fired on a different lane from the one on which the practice table was fired.

The following additional training tips, which are used to train OSUT soldiers, can be easily incorporated into unit marksmanship programs:

- Leaders should familiarize themselves with the manuals. The new FM 23-9 contains many good training tips on marksmanship. It covers the phases of training, lists the training aids and devices that are available, and provides a helpful range operations checklist.
- Ownership of the training program should be established in the subordinate leaders. Training should not be surrendered to a committee-type approach. Squad leaders should be made responsible for training their squads, and a competition or reward system should be established, with an awards ceremony or visible recognition for the best individual firers and the best subordinate units.
- Good marksmanship skills should be practiced whenever weapons are used in training. Even when soldiers are firing blanks, they should practice good shooting fundamentals.
- MILES or Weaponeer systems should be used when live ammunition is not available. This gives soldiers immediate, accurate feedback without going to the range.

Good marksmanship is a critical but easily degraded skill. As infantrymen we rely on our ability to shoot well; as leaders we owe it to our soldiers to train them well.

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Scout Platoon Vehicle

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As an observer-controller at the National Training Center (NTC), I participated in three ground cavalry training rotations. The first two involved the cavalry troops of the 194th Armor Brigade (Separate) and the 197th Infantry Brigade (Separate). The third involved a troop of the 3d Squadron, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR). I believe that the results of this training have certain implications for J-series mechanized infantry scout platoons.

The organization of these three troops was virtually identical—basically regimental cavalry troops of two tank and two scout platoons with a heavy mortar section. They were organized exactly the same as those in a J-series mechanized infantry unit. Their equipment, however, was radically different. The two separate brigade troops were equipped with M60A3 tanks and M901 ITVs for their scout platoons, while the 3d ACR troops had M1A1 tanks and M113s with TOW caps; we called the latter vehicles M220s.

I won't dwell on the obvious advantages of an M1A1 over an M60A3. What was interesting to me was the difference in performance between the two types of scout platoons. The scout platoon of the